

The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk?

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The process by which warfighters assemble information, analyze it, make decisions, and direct their units has challenged commanders since the beginning of warfare. Starting with the Vietnam War, they faced a new challenge—commanding their units before a television camera. Today, commanders at all levels can count on operating “24/7”¹ on a global stage before a live camera that never blinks. This changed environment has a profound effect on how strategic leaders make their decisions and how warfighters direct their commands.

The impact of this kind of media coverage has been dubbed “the CNN effect,” referring to the widely available round-the-clock broadcasts of the Cable News Network. The term was born in controversy. In 1992 President Bush’s decision to place troops in Somalia after viewing media coverage of starving refugees was sharply questioned. Were American interests really at stake? Was CNN deciding where the military goes next? Less than a year later, President Clinton’s decision to withdraw US troops after scenes were televised of a dead American serviceman being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu seemed to confirm the power of CNN. Today, with the proliferation of 24/7 news networks, the impact of CNN alone may have diminished, but the collective presence of round-the-clock news coverage has continued to grow. In this article, the term “the CNN effect” represents the collective impact of all real-time news coverage—indeed, that is what the term has come to mean generally.

The advent of real-time news coverage has led to immediate public awareness and scrutiny of strategic decisions and military operations as they unfold. Is this a net gain or loss for strategic leaders and warfighters? The military welcomes the awareness but is leery of the scrutiny. The fourth estate’s vast resources offer commanders exceptional opportunities. Yet the press—including both print and electronic news media—still receives mixed reviews from the military. Many in the military view the media’s intrusion as a potential operational

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risk and, perhaps, a career risk. But the military needs the media to keep Americans informed and engaged in order to garner public support for its operations. The CNN effect thus is a double-edged sword—a strategic enabler and a potential operational risk.

This article begins with an analysis of the evolution of the military-media relationship in the television age. That analysis will provide the basis for some insights on why the military and the media have such a tenuous, distrustful relationship. In spite of their mutual suspicions, this article will argue that the military needs the media now more than ever. Thus, strategic leaders and senior warfighters should explore how they can best work with the media as an enabler while mitigating potential operational risks.

Military-Media Relations: A Look Back

General Andrew J. Goodpaster (USA Ret.), former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, succinctly summarized the relationship between the military and the media:

While there is—or should be—a natural convergence of interests in providing to the public accurate information about our armed forces and what they do, there is at the same time an inherent clash of interests (especially acute when men are fighting and dying) between military leaders responsible for success in battle and for the lives of their commands, and a media intensely competitive in providing readers and viewers with quick and vivid “news” and opinion.²

If one views the media as representing the people in Clausewitz’s trinity (generally, if somewhat inaccurately, characterized as the people, the military, and the government), the first half of General Goodpaster’s statement regarding a “natural convergence of interests” rings true. In a perfect world, with the media serving as the lens for the American people, the nation needs the media to ensure equilibrium among the people, its elected officials, and its subordinate military. Yet General Goodpaster’s reference to a clash of interests is also true. The media, though committed to getting the story right, are also in the business of reporting exciting news that sells. To the contrary, the military often has a life-and-death responsibility to withhold information (and, in truth, sometimes less virtuous reasons). It is this ensuing clash that has stymied the military-media relationship, especially since the advent of television.

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Though this new technology should have brought the military closer to its policymakers and the people, it did not. The confluence of events in the 1960s and early 1970s—a TV in virtually every American living room, a failed policy in Vietnam, and a lost war—served to divide sharply the military and the media. In the military, this painful experience planted seeds of hatred toward the media that permeated the military culture for decades. Colonel Henry Gole (USA Ret.), writing about attitudes of Army War College students in the 1980s, observed, “Some 20 years after their experience in Vietnam, student attitudes toward the media were overwhelmingly negative and seemingly permanent, at least in that generation of embittered officers.”³ Later, in 1990, Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor (USMC Ret.) noted, “The credo of the military seems to have become ‘duty, honor, country, and hate the media.’”⁴ More recently, Don Oberdorfer, a former military affairs correspondent for *The Washington Post*, offered, “A whole generation of military officers grew up believing that the press was the problem, not the enemy.”⁵

In addition to the clash between military and media objectives, there is a cultural cleavage that some would say is sharpened by having an all-volunteer force. Joe Galloway of *U.S. News & World Report* calls the cultural gap, “a struggle between the ‘anarchists’ and the ‘control freaks.’”⁶ Military officers want to control, as much as possible, everything on the battlefield or area of operations. On the other hand, reporters want unfettered access to all aspects of an operation. Commanders worry over leaks of information that might compromise an operation. Keeping secrets is anathema to a reporter. Exacerbating these divergent tendencies are the different personalities the two professions attract. The military attracts people who follow the rules; the media attract those who thrive on “less is more” when it comes to establishing rules for reporting. Nonetheless, both the media and the military share a commitment to American freedoms, and neither wants a news story to be the cause of a single American soldier’s death.

While media technology and military-media relations have changed over the last half-century, so has warfare changed in the information age, as has the nature of military deployments. The following paragraphs will review the military-media evolution from the Vietnam War through recent peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance missions to the outset of the current “war on terrorism” in Afghanistan.

Vietnam (1961-75)

The Vietnam War was a seminal event in military-media relations. It marked the first television coverage of war and a monumental shift in relations between the media and the American military. It also was the last time reporters enjoyed unfettered access without censorship in an American war. Americans saw battle scenes with real soldiers, not John Wayne or Errol Flynn, on the screen. Said one American infantryman in Vietnam in 1965, "Cameras. That's all I see wherever I look. Sometimes, I'm not sure whether I'm a soldier or an extra in a bad movie."⁷ The nightly network news brought into American kitchens and living rooms images of American soldiers killing and being wounded and killed, displaced civilians, and destroyed Vietnamese villages. These images were more powerful than any print medium could ever be. And they were generally America's first experience with real war images, since no war had been fought on American soil since the Civil War.

Before the Vietnam War, the American press had generally supported national war efforts and the national leadership with positive stories. The Vietnam War was different. This time reporters told of American units that lacked discipline, and of troops using drugs on the battlefield. They interviewed US soldiers who questioned US war aims while the war was ongoing.⁸ Such stories, though factual, were viewed by the military as negative. Moreover, the uniformed leadership viewed these stories as a major reason they were losing the war at home while they were winning the battles in Vietnam.

In a war without front lines, reporters went wherever they could get transportation to and reported on whatever happened there.⁹ This kind of reporting led military leaders to feel as though coverage was random and, when negative, biased. Reporters viewed the official version of the war—briefed at the nightly "Five O'Clock Follies"—with disdain, as they often had seen a very different picture out on the battlefield that same day. This fueled the skepticism and distrust of military leaders and government officials held by most reporters covering the war.¹⁰

The media's enormous negative coverage of the Tet Offensive marked the turning point in the Vietnam War and, as such, became the basis for heated debate as to whether the military or the media lost the war. The disturbing images on the TV screen were in sharp contrast to the official reports by the government and military leadership that the United States was, in fact, winning the war and would be out of Vietnam soon. But the initial reports on Tet also were misleading.¹¹ After Tet in 1968, the reports began to be about the difference between what Washington said versus what reporters in Vietnam saw. The media discredited military official reports on the progress of the war, thus creating a divide that would last for decades.

What did the US armed forces learn from this experience? They definitely learned that they needed the support of the American people—trying to hide two parts of Clausewitz's strategic triangle from the third didn't work. That became the story. What the military failed to see was the importance of the media as a conduit to the people. This failure was clearly evidenced in the next conflict, Grenada.

Grenada (1983)

If the US military can be criticized for preparing for the last war when approaching the next one, the same can be said for its approach to handling the press in Grenada. The overwhelming lesson from Vietnam seemed to have been, “Keep the press out!” A small island located south of Barbados in the Caribbean, Grenada offered the military the opportunity to do just that. President Reagan left the decision for media access to the military, and ultimately it rested with the operational commander of Joint Task Force 120, Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, who infuriated reporters by banning them from the area.

A few journalists managed to get a small boat to transport them from Barbados. As they approached Grenada, Admiral Metcalf personally ordered shots fired across the bow of the media’s vessel, forcing them to return to Barbados. Shortly thereafter, one of these reporters asked Metcalf what he would have done had the reporters not changed course. Metcalf replied, “I’d have blown your ass right out of the water!”¹² Under pressure from the press and Congress, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Vessey, ordered Admiral Metcalf to accommodate reporters starting on the third day of the operation, 28 October 1983. General Vessey considered the exclusion of the media in this operation from the beginning to be a “huge mistake at the national level.”¹³

Thus, following Grenada, General Vessey appointed a commission to study military-media relations. The panel was composed of active-duty military officers and retired journalists. Retired Major General Winant Sidle, for whom the panel and its report were named, headed it. The establishment of press pools was the key recommendation of the Sidle Report and the most controversial. The media panel members agreed with its basic recommendation:

When it becomes apparent during military operational planning that news media pooling provides the only feasible means of furnishing the media with early access to an operation, planning should support the largest possible press pool that is practical and minimize the length of time the pool will be necessary.¹⁴

However, three full pages of comments highlighting division on interpretations of various aspects of this recommendation were also included in the report.

Panama (1989)

The military and the press generally considered the Sidle Report a success. The military felt confident it could control media access by controlling pools of reporters. The media were pleased that the Chairman would formally instruct commanders to plan to incorporate the media in their operations from the earliest planning stages. But planning for the media in Operation Just Cause in Panama translated to keeping the media in the dark to ensure secrecy and then allowing a tightly controlled media pool in country after the start of hostilities. The military provided little support to the media. Without transportation, the media could not get the whole story.¹⁵

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Media access in Panama was nearly as limited as it had been in Grenada. The decision to ignore the recommendations of the Sidle Report by essentially excluding the media until the operation was ongoing and then tightly controlling and censoring information was made at the highest level of government.¹⁶ This frustrated reporters and, perhaps, precluded the military from demonstrating its technical and tactical competence. While live reporting had missed what was later described by General Colin Powell as a “sloppy success” in Grenada, the Panama operation was carefully planned, rehearsed, and executed.¹⁷

In spite of missing the first hours of the invasion and then being sequestered by the military, reporters did get out and did report. For CNN, this was its “first war as a media event.”¹⁸ Live reporting frustrated General Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, because armchair strategists were critiquing General Max Thurman’s operations as they unfolded. This in turn led to pressure on the White House to direct Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney to direct Powell to pass along orders he himself did not agree with. Powell realized that this was the beginning of a new, information-age military-media relationship. He later reflected, “This was a new, tough age for the military, fighting a war as it was being reported. We could not, in a country pledged to free expression, simply turn off the press. But we were going to have to find a way to live with this unprecedented situation.”¹⁹

In sharp contrast, the reaction of CNN’s Peter Arnett was one filled with excitement: “The Panama story showed CNN just how alluring live coverage of a crisis could be. CNN now had the technology, the skills, and [the] money to go live anywhere in the world.”²⁰ To get that live coverage, reporters could not confine themselves to press pools controlled by the government. To prepare for the next war, correspondents would need to be less dependent on the government for access, communications, and transportation. Information technologies put the reporters back on the battlefield in the Gulf War and this time they were reporting live.

Gulf War (1991)

Operation Desert Storm “was the most widely and most swiftly reported war in history.”²¹ In addition to being the first “CNN War,” this war also

marked a turning point in military-media relations and a turning point for Americans' view of that relationship. General Powell had learned his lesson from the Panama invasion and ensured not only media access but made certain the right kind of spokesman stood before the camera lens before the American audience. Powell recalled, "We auditioned spokespersons. . . . We picked Lieutenant General Tom Kelly as our Pentagon briefer because Kelly not only was deeply knowledgeable, but came across like Norm in the sitcom *Cheers*, a regular guy whom people could relate to and trust."²²

Powell also understood that live press conferences meant that the public would see both questioner and responder. Ever since the Vietnam War, the public had viewed the media as fighting to get the truth from a military hiding behind a cloak of secrecy and a government spending \$600 on toilet seats. During the Gulf War, Americans saw members of both the media and the military on their TV screens. Powell later wrote, "When the public got to watch journalists, even the best reporters sometimes came across as bad guys."²³ Perhaps the strongest evidence of the shift in American perceptions was a *Saturday Night Live* skit in which the media were portrayed as enemy Iraqis trying to wrestle secret American war plans away from an Army spokesperson.

In general, the media were supportive of the American soldiers in the Persian Gulf. Though the reporting was positive, the coverage did not convey the whole story on the battlefield. Journalists were more or less welcomed by unit commanders. The Army was reticent to "embedding" the media, while the Marine Corps welcomed media attention.²⁴ Thus, the Marine Corps enjoyed overwhelmingly good and proportionally larger press coverage for a relatively smaller role in the war.²⁵ Colonel Barry E. Willey, then an Army public affairs officer, concluded, "Most military commanders would have to agree that the media coverage of Desert Shield/Desert Storm was balanced and generally favorable where cooperation, patience, and tolerance were evident."²⁶

Somalia (1992-93) and Haiti (1994)

Somalia was an example of careful planning for involvement of the media. Some thought it was too well planned. As the marines arrived on a Somali beach that looked more like a movie set than a real beach, it appeared as though the marines were posturing before the cameras under bright television lights. Nonetheless, the reports on media access were positive. According to Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence in their 1995 report of military-media relations, "There were few if any complaints from the news media about their treatment by the military in Somalia or Haiti."²⁷

For Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti, the military planned to incorporate the media well in advance of the operation. Reporters were given top-secret plans for the operation prior to the planned invasion, and David Wood, a seasoned national security correspondent for Newhouse News, was assigned a seat on the command and control aircraft that would oversee the operation. While US envoys

former President Jimmy Carter, General Powell, and Senator Sam Nunn were negotiating with Lieutenant General Raul Cedras, the leader of the Haitian junta, the Pentagon was negotiating with reporters. Could the media stay in their hotels for the first 12 hours?²⁸ How about a news blackout for the first six to eight hours? Ultimately, the media agreed to a self-imposed embargo on “all broadcast video depicting or describing troop landing locations during the first hour of the intervention.”²⁹ The media also agreed not to repeat the use of lights, for which both they and the marines had been ridiculed following their arrival in Somalia.

Bosnia (1995-present)

In what was considered a “bold and innovative” move by the Army in military-media relations, the Army decided to “embed” about two dozen reporters in the units deployed to Bosnia in late December 1995.³⁰ Commanders hoped that this arrangement would produce positive stories for the Army, thus generating support from the American people while bolstering soldiers’ morale. Though the press coverage of the Army’s deployment to Bosnia generally achieved these objectives, it also produced some controversial stories.³¹

In December 1995, *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Tom Ricks reported remarks made by Colonel Gregory Fontenot, who was commanding the first armored brigade to enter Bosnia. Ricks reported that Fontenot warned two black American soldiers that Croats were racists, and he expressed reservations that the American military would be out of Bosnia within 12 months.³² This latter view was in sharp contrast to the White House’s official position. Fontenot’s remarks and their press coverage stirred a controversy in the military. Was this promising brigade commander passed over for promotion to flag rank because of Ricks’ reporting? The pejorative title of Richard Newman’s case study detailing the controversy, “Burned by the Press: One Commander’s Experience,” suggests that the answer is yes. However, the study itself offers little evidence to support a direct linkage between Ricks’ articles and Fontenot’s promotion potential.³³ Though the question of whether press coverage halted Fontenot’s career will never be answered, many important lessons emerged from his experience.³⁴ Most important, the practice of embedding reporters was judged to be a success by reporters and the 1st Armored Division’s commander, Major General William Nash.

Kosovo (1999-present)

Kosovo serves as an illustration of the sharp contrast between military-media relations during war versus peace operations. In Bosnia the media were embraced by the military during the peacekeeping phase, but during the Kosovo air campaign, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, General Wesley Clark, issued a “gag order” that angered reporters. Clark’s policy led to numerous stories about the lack of information provided by NATO and the Pentagon.³⁵ Some stories went so far as to compare the Pentagon’s handling of the press with the way it had been managed in Vietnam.³⁶

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Frustrated by daily official briefings that provided little information, reporters tried to get out to the field to get the real story. The gag order also created an opportunity for Slobodan Milosevic to tell his side of the story. Angered by Milosevic’s disinformation campaign, Clark demanded that NATO be allowed to bomb the Serbs’ TV station.³⁷ Following the air campaign, the military reverted back to the practice of embedding reporters in units.

Implications for the Future

In the months before the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, the military and the media seemed to be on much better terms than a decade before. At the most recent US Army War College Media Day in fall 2001, many visiting journalists remarked that the era of “hating the media” seemed to have passed.³⁸ At the very least, war college students seem to have come to realize the importance of learning how to get along with the media. This is evidenced by the popularity of the college’s “Military and the Media” elective. Further, in a recent survey of 927 military officers asked to respond to the statement, “The news media are just as necessary to maintaining the freedom of the United States as the military,” 83 percent expressed agreement.³⁹

In an age of multiple 24-hour cable news networks using satellite technology, the CNN effect will exert even greater pressures on the tension between the “control freaks” and the “anarchists.” In the first few weeks of the war in Afghanistan, the media had limited access to military operations. As reported by *The New York Times*’ Elizabeth Becker, the “military has imposed a tight lid . . . trying to walk the fine line of saying enough to reassure the public that the war is on target but keeping the news media at bay.”⁴⁰

For the strategic leader and warfighter, it is important to understand these tensions and how to balance the military’s need to control information as a matter of operational security with the media’s desire to inform the public. It is also important for strategic leaders and warfighters to understand the media as a potent force multiplier in a wide variety of areas. Recognizing the power of television, General Powell instructed National Defense University students, “Once you’ve got all the forces moving and everything’s being taken care of by the com-

manders, turn your attention to television, because you can win the battle but lose the war if you don't handle the story right."⁴¹

Operational Risk

In the CNN age of broadcasting, information is available globally in real time. For the warfighter, the potential for the enemy knowing as much as he knows is a grave risk. How does a commander achieve surprise in such an environment? In the Gulf War, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf achieved operational surprise by constraining press pools. In Haiti, the White House openly announced its intention to invade Haiti as part of its diplomatic strategy to pressure General Cedras to back down. In Bosnia, General Clark issued a gag order; however, this order made him appear to be adopting Vietnam-era media relations. Most recently, in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld barred reporters from USS *Kitty Hawk*, where some special operations forces were based, while allowing reporters on the other two carriers based in the Arabian Sea.

The debate over whether the military will be able to control the media or should be able to control the media in the next war continues.⁴² The key for the operational commander will be to inform the public fully without endangering the mission. If steps to control the media must be taken, the public will have to understand why it is necessary. The military can play an important role in informing the public to gain their support on why such restrictions on First Amendment rights sometimes must be instituted.

In addition to operational security, the strategic leader and operational commander have to consider the impact that information availability has on command and control. If information is available to several levels of command simultaneously, the questions then become who will the decisionmaker be and who will act. A valid concern is that the President and his immediate advisers, as a result of the CNN effect, will have the capability and possibly the desire to micro-manage the war. In a CNN war where the President and other senior leaders are held accountable for tactical actions by a public media in real time, these leaders may feel compelled to become more involved as the situation develops. That happened on a small scale in Panama.⁴³

It's tempting to prescribe a solution that stipulates carefully delineated areas of responsibility to alleviate this problem. But in reality, what we have seen is an increasingly global situational awareness for the President and his defense advisers, as well as for such organizations as NATO and the UN. The result is a fluid political situation complicated by international relationships, cultural values, and divergent goals. This presents an increasingly complicated challenge for the operational commander who must maintain command and control of the military forces in theater while simultaneously maintaining situational awareness of changes at the strategic level. Just as a clearly communicated commander's intent solidifies unity of effort in the echelons below his level, a clearly defined

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strategic end-state secures unity of purpose between the operational and strategic command levels. This places a premium on the operational commander having a thorough understanding of the military’s role as an instrument of foreign policy.

Strategic leaders and operational commanders can mitigate the difficulties of these complexities by training in peacetime. Because decisions will affect a much broader spectrum of warfare, training and education in all levels of warfare are essential. Human judgments and decisions can be rehearsed, practiced, and gamed in peacetime. In addition to realistic training in peacetime for commanders and staffs at the operational and strategic levels, this training should include senior defense officials, members of the media, and representatives of civilian agencies that participate in wartime operations. There will always be contingencies that we fail to predict. However, operational commanders must be practiced in interfacing with senior leaders, the media, and civilian agencies under realistic time constraints so we can count on them to be prepared in wartime decisionmaking situations before a live camera.

Strategic Enabler

In an era in which “wars can be won [or lost] on the world’s television screens as well as on the battlefield,”⁴⁴ strategic leaders and warfighters must be proactive and innovative in dealing with the media. The satellite television age offers strategic leaders and warfighters exceptional opportunities to leverage the media—to use the vast resources of the fourth estate to their advantage. The media can be a strategic enabler in a number of ways: to communicate the objective and end-state to a global audience, to execute effective psychological operations (PSYOPS), to play a major role in deception of the enemy, and to supplement intelligence collection efforts.

A word of caution: Such suggestions may be anathema to the press, or at least to mainstream news organizations. The notion of “using” the media understandably—if not invariably—will cause serious concerns for skeptical and independent reporters and editors. The intent may not be to dupe anyone, however. There is certainly nothing sinister implied in suggesting that the military use the media as a conduit to accurately and honestly convey information to the Ameri-

can people about the operations in which their military is engaged. On the other hand, using the media for PSYOPS or deception operations, for example, may be instances where the media would rebel at any involvement. In any such cases, up-front honesty on the part of commanders would be essential.

In spite of the cultural divisions and potential operational risks, strategic leaders should never cede the “CNN battlefield” to the media. To adopt a “control freak” attitude or to go so far as to issue “gag orders” wastes a valuable opportunity to communicate directly with the American people. It also risks causing the media to become uninformed, suspicious, and alienated, resulting in inaccurate or biased reporting. In the face of the gag order during the Kosovo air campaign, Andrew Rosenthal, foreign editor of *The New York Times*, explained, “The press reflects what is going on. If the Administration is sitting on its hands and not explaining itself, we have to go to other analysts. And dissenters are always more willing to talk.”⁴⁵

Instead, in this era of instantaneous worldwide communications, the American military should use its standing as one of the most respected US institutions to make its case for how military force should or shouldn’t be used on a global stage. In the words of one veteran Pentagon correspondent, the “combatant commander is expected to play a public relations role, not just fight the good fight. He must project a strong reassuring presence . . . and explain a war’s objectives and risks.”⁴⁶ The fourth estate offers a superb mechanism for strategic leaders and warfighters to transmit operational objectives and goals, as well as to reinforce strategic policy objectives. If the military wastes the opportunity to explain itself in the satellite television age—and in a time in which the military is more generally respected than the media—then the military risks having the images of the battlespace presented to the global village, and perhaps more important to the American people and our own troops, in a distorted manner. Inaccurate depictions of operations can have a devastating effect on what is often the US strategic center of gravity, the will of the American people, as well as on the decisionmaking process at the strategic level.

In addition to being able to clarify for the American audience the linkage between operational goals and strategic policy objectives, the media have the potential to support PSYOPS directed at an opposing force and its population. During Desert Storm the media provided General Schwarzkopf with the means to showcase US military might directly to the Iraqi military. Senator Nunn has often stated that live reports of American paratroopers lifting off from Fort Bragg en route to invade Haiti directly led to General Cedras’s decision to step down.⁴⁷ As further evidence of the power of CNN, when the US military arrived in Haiti the day after Cedras’s capitulation, the Haitians warmly welcomed the US troops.⁴⁸ In Bosnia, Major General Nash “wanted to use the power of the world press to influence compliance by the former warring factions with the Dayton Accords.”⁴⁹ The world could witness confrontation or compliance firsthand.

Media reporting can have a positive effect on US soldiers as well. At a 1991 MIT symposium on “Reporting the Gulf War,” a Marine Corps representative “argued that the press coverage acted as a ‘force multiplier’ by keeping marines motivated and keeping US and world opinion firmly behind the marines.”⁵⁰ Major General Nash also recognized this potential of the media to “enhance the soldiers’ morale” when he decided to embed the media in the 1st Armored Division in Bosnia.

Two other important roles the media can play are to provide intelligence to the military and to report as a part of a deception plan. General Schwarzkopf’s use of the media to obscure his famous left hook maneuver in Desert Storm is well documented. However, the media’s role as a source of intelligence is perhaps less obvious. The media can be an important source of information for two reasons. First, they may be in country before operations begin, as in Haiti, Bosnia, Somalia, and Afghanistan. This gives them important firsthand knowledge of the people, their culture, the landscape, and events leading up to the operations. Second, because of their mobility, reporters can frequently move about the area of operations more freely than uniformed military can; consequently, they can be an important source of “open intelligence.”⁵¹

In short, the military should use the media as an important strategic enabler. The media provide the military the means to ensure the American public is informed and engaged. The media provide the military with a global stage to send its message and aid in executing its mission. And they have great potential as a force multiplier, a source of intelligence, and a resource for conducting PSYOPS.

Conclusion

The military and the media have improved their relationship since the days of the Vietnam War, America’s first television war. Satellite technology and the proliferation of 24/7 news networks have created and increased the so-called CNN effect on strategic-level decisionmaking and on how warfighters direct their commands. The military needs to understand, anticipate, and plan for this new dynamic. Friction between the military and the media will continue to some degree in the future. As Professor Loren Thompson of Georgetown University succinctly put it:

Even if the dilemmas of war coverage are fully appreciated on both sides and journalists and soldiers develop a sympathetic view of each other’s needs and responsibilities, friction will persist. Tension between major public institutions is inherent in the functioning of democracy, and it is not surprising that such tension is most pronounced in a setting where lives are lost and national interests are at stake.⁵²

In spite of this friction, strategic leaders and warfighters should harness the increasing power of the fourth estate as a strategic enabler while hedging against operational risk.

NOTES

1. Meaning, if not yet a cliché, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
2. As quoted in Lloyd J. Matthews, ed., *Newsman and National Defense: Is Conflict Inevitable?* (New York: Brassey's, 1991).
3. Henry G. Gole, "Don't Kill the Messenger: Vietnam War Reporting in Context," *Parameters*, 26 (Winter 1996-97), 152.
4. Bernard E. Trainor, "The Military and the Media: A Troubled Embrace," in Matthews, p. 122, reprinted from *Parameters*, 20 (December 1990), pp. 2-11.
5. As quoted in Elizabeth Becker, "In the War on Terrorism, A Battle to Shape Opinion," *The New York Times*, 11 November 2001, p. B4.
6. As quoted in Richard Newman, "Burned by the Press: One Commander's Experience" (case study), Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, National Security Study, September 2000, p. 10.
7. Peter Stoler, *The War Against the Press: Politics, Pressure and Intimidation in the 80's* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1986), p. 57.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
9. Dan Rather with Mickey Herskowitz, *The Camera Never Blinks: Adventures of a TV Journalist* (New York: William Morrow, 1977), pp. 195-211.
10. Barry E. Willey, "The Military-Media Connection: For Better or For Worse," *Military Review*, 78 (December 1998 - February 1999), pp. 15.
11. In his definitive work on media coverage during the Tet period in Vietnam, Peter Braestrup writes,

Compared to the far larger attacks on Tan Son Nhut air base, as well as other actions in the Saigon area, the embassy fight was minor. But because of its "symbolism" and, above all, its accessibility to newsmen, it dominated the initial Tet coverage. Moreover, because of confusion and haste, the first reports made it seem that the foe had succeeded, not failed, in seizing his objective: the embassy chancery. Even as the fog cleared, corrections were slow in coming. Newsmen, this reporter included, were willing, even eager, to believe the worst. It was a classic case of journalistic reaction to surprise.
- Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How The American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, abridged edition of original 1977 two-volume series (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1994), p. 75.
12. H. Norman Schwarzkopf with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 258.
13. Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury: Grenada* (Washington: Joint History Office, 1997), p. 5.
14. Winant Sidle, "Report of the CJCS Media-Military Relations Panel (Sidle Panel)" (Washington: Department of Defense, 23 August 1984), p. 1.
15. Miles Hudson and John Stanier describe the early hours of Operation Just Cause as follows: "Meanwhile the unfortunate Washington press correspondents had landed at the US Howard Air Force Base in Panama some five hours after most of the action had taken place. After a further delay of two hours, a helicopter was found to move the reporters. Demanding to be taken to the scene of the action, they were flown only into the base at Fort Clayton, from which they could see little and find out less." Miles Hudson and John Stanier, *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight* (Washington Square: New York Univ. Press, 1998), p. 206.
16. Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 178.
17. Colin Powell with Joseph E. Perisco, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 292.
18. Peter Arnett, *Live From the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad, 35 Years in the World's War Zones* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 342.
19. Powell, pp. 431-33.
20. Arnett, p. 343.
21. Hudson and Stanier, p. 209.
22. Powell, p. 529.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Nancy Ethiel, ed., *Reporting the Next War*, Cantigny Conference Series (Chicago: Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, April 1992), pp. 12-13.
25. Barrie Dunsmore, *The Next War: Live?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, March 1996), p. 5. See also Frank J. Stech, "Winning CNN Wars," *Parameters*, 24 (Autumn 1994), 47. Also of note, following the Gulf War, Army Major General Paul E. Funk told a group of journalists, "When I returned from Southwest Asia, I was upset to find that people did not know the 3d Armored Division and VII Corps had been in a very heavy fight under heavy contact with some of the enemy's first-rate

units. . . . I did not try to avoid the [press] interviews, but on the other hand, I did not seek the publicity either. In retrospect, I probably should have for the division's sake." Paul E. Funk, "Accommodating the Wartime Media: A Commander's Task," *Military Review*, 73 (April 1993), 79.

26. Willey, p. 16.

27. Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence, *America's Team—The Odd Couple: A Report on the Relationship Between the Media and the Military* (Nashville, Tenn.: The Freedom Forum First Center, Vanderbilt University, 1995), p. 45.

28. Warren P. Strobel, *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington: US Institute of Peace Press, 1997), pp. 94, 110-11.

29. Peter Young and Peter Jesser, *The Media and The Military: From the Crimea to Desert Strike* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 264.

30. Charles Moskos, *The Media and the Military in Peace and Humanitarian Operations* (Chicago: McCormick Tribune Foundation, January 2000), p. 26. Embedding the reporters in the units means that the reporters lived with and traveled with a unit for an extended period of time. For the Bosnia operation, reporters were assigned to units based in Germany a week or so before deployment so that they could observe pre-deployment training. Then these reporters traveled to Bosnia with their units and stayed with them for two to three weeks.

31. Newman, p. 1.

32. For a concise summary and analysis of these events, see Moskos, p. 26. For details of these events, see Newman. Newman was also embedded with Fontenot's unit. Fontenot did not dispute the accuracy of the rather colorful quotes.

33. As Professor Charles C. Moskos, author of numerous books on the sociology of the military, points out: "This incident has consequences beyond its immediate effect on Colonel Fontenot's career. At one level is the question of the impact on unit morale when a respected commander is rebuked in the national media. The other is the chilling effect on military personnel when journalists are around. The message is clear: stay clear of reporters, even friendly ones, lest one's career might be jeopardized." Moskos, p. 26.

34. The most glaring error was that Fontenot never established ground rules with Ricks. Thus, Ricks believed everything was on the record. In sharp contrast, Fontenot's division commander, Major General William Nash, clearly established what was on and what was off the record. See Newman's case study for details.

35. Eric Schmitt, "Conflict in the Balkans: The Briefings; US Media Policy: Justify Air Assault but Skimp on Detail," *The New York Times*, 27 March 1999, sec. 1A, p.1. Also, see Bradley Graham, defense correspondent for *The Washington Post*, who reported that "Kosovo represented a setback for relations between the military and media. The Pentagon's whole approach left a lot of unnecessary ill feelings among reporters, particularly those of us who have worked very hard to try to understand the military and handle sensitive subjects responsibly." Quoted in James Kitfield, "The Pen and the Sword," *Government Executive*, 1 April 2000, internet, <http://www.govexec.com/features/0400/0400s1.htm>, accessed 18 June 2002.

36. Craig R. Whitney, "Crisis in the Balkans: News Analysis: Memo from Brussels; Facts at Briefings Scarce, But Polemics Are Abundant," *The New York Times*, 3 April 1999, sec. 1A, p.1.

37. Craig R. Whitney, "Crisis in the Balkans: The Alliance; NATO's Generals and Civilians Clash Over Bombing TV," *The New York Times*, 9 April 1999, sec. 1A, p.1.

38. Author's observation.

39. Aukofer and Lawrence, pp. 29-30.

40. Becker, p. B4.

41. Powell, as quoted in Woodward, p. 155.

42. Dunsmore quotes numerous points of views on this question.

43. Powell related two instances when he was pressured to pass orders coming from the White House through Cheney to Thurman that were a direct result of 24-hour media news coverage in Panama. Powell, pp. 431-33.

44. Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), p. 147.

45. Felicity Barringer, "A New War Drew Methods for Covering It," *The New York Times*, 21 June 1999, sec. 1A, p.1.

46. Eric Schmitt, "Front and Center, a Commander Faces the Media," *The New York Times*, 9 November 2001, p. B3.

47. Leslie H. Belknap traveled with Senator Nunn to Orlando, Fla., on 12 October 1994, where he remarked on two separate occasions to audiences that reports that the 82d Airborne were on the way accelerated their last-minute negotiations with Cedras. General Powell also relates the last minute negotiations (Powell, p. 601).

48. Strobel, p. 189.

49. As quoted in Newman, p. 8.

50. Stech, p. 47.

51. Strobel, p. 229.

52. Loren B. Thompson, "The Military Versus the Media," in *Defense Beat: The Dilemmas of Defense Coverage*, ed. Loren B. Thompson (New York: Lexington Books, 1991), p. 56.